

Ibbett

Three Letters from  
W.J. Ibbett to his Friend  
H. Buxton Forman  
in praise of Venus



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# THREE LETTERS

FROM W. J. IBBETT TO HIS FRIEND

H. BUXTON FORMAN

## IN PRAISE OF VENUS



LONDON

PRINTED AT THE CHISWICK PRESS

1894



THREE LETTERS IN PRAISE  
OF VENUS.

*"Lucretius—nobler than his mood :  
Who dropped his plummet down the broad  
Deep universe, and said 'No God,'—*

*"Finding no bottom : he denied  
Divinely the divine, and died  
Chief poet on the Tiber-side,*

*By grace of God !"*

*A VISION OF POETS.*

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THE BENIGNITY OF VENUS IN  
THE VEGETABLE WORLD.



## FIRST LETTER.

DEAR FORMAN, I am sorry that the stress  
And ills of life have brought you weariness,  
The more because your dark self bears within  
The flame that long has been the bane of men  
Who view the things around with piercing glance,  
And love them quick to their own dire mischance ;  
For slowly comes their answer, as the life  
Of common things is slow ; and caution's rife  
Begot of all the pain of all the days,  
And eagerness is rare as happy lays.  
But to assuage the turmoil of your heart  
Is now the aim of my defective art  
That yearns to make your tired attention glad

At what I shall set down in guise so bad,  
That you will smile, first at your halting friend,  
And after praise the sweetness of his end.

It is an ancient story that I tell  
Of Her, the fount of life and light as well,  
Great Venus, who has led the world along  
Through time of gladness, and through time of wrong, 20  
As we now call it who are far away,  
Though suns were bright and marriage went alway.  
'There never could have been, there never will  
Be that all-doleful time that stories fill  
With monsters, giants, ill-compounded gods,  
Who fall asunder into dirty clods  
Before the gaze of him that loves his child ;  
Such things are not for men that, free and wild  
As they may be, see all things bright and clear,  
And, pleased with life, know not the face of fear. 30

Now is the hazel gay in hedge and wood,  
While its long tassels pour a copious flood

Of sperm upon the scarlet-lippéd bud,  
Careless what eyes may see the profuse kiss,  
So bounteous that the tree scarce deigns to miss  
The pieces plucked by rosy boy or girl,  
Or greater limbs wrenched by the ruthless churl.  
Immodest tassels and immodest lips !  
Unknowing aught of hot and secret slips  
Beneath bright stars ; for the quick blush of shame 40  
Only with fear of death by violence came :  
She-wolves that clip their lovers in a vice  
Are helpless 'fore the hunter's avarice  
Of blood, and therefore lure their mates away  
To darksome coverts where their lust may play,  
And end in sleep ; the rams embrace so quick,  
'Tis love and leave me for their dames ; the thick,  
Sharp sloe embowers the nest of birds ; the house  
Shelters the love of woman and of mouse,  
Fearful or pleased at the she-cat that cries 50  
'Through night's dark hall of her love's victories.

But slower flowers fear not any foe :  
Their blossom plucked, plants do but stronger grow  
To their next bout of love, when they shall show  
What pleasure Venus takes in lusty flowers ;  
For their fair hues are many as the hours  
That fill the year ; nor is the sweet delight  
That thrills mankind before their colour bright  
An human thing alone. The eternal flies,  
Dainty and gauzed as girls, are just as wise :  
These quick and coloured ornaments of air  
Stoop to adore the mute expanse more fair  
Than their own carnival of restlessness,  
And sleep at night amid the hues they bless.  
Some men affirm 'tis but the hue of meat  
That leads the flies to perch with eager feet  
Upon deceitful feasts, that merest food  
Attracts their sudden swoops ; but meat is good  
To fly and man : and who shall dare to say  
That what each loves is not his meat for aye ?



And many things are loved, while reason fails  
A thousand times for once that it prevails  
And holds its own. Dead reasons' chaffy sheaves  
Litter the towns with unregarded leaves :  
Love never dies. But 'tis enough to know  
That gendering plants with colour are aglow,  
And lure with beauty or with fruit the care  
Of fly and man to ensure their increase fair.  
They conjure up a brightness in man's face  
And quicker movements in the insect race, 80  
While men, birds, insects, happy rivals are  
To thrust away from earth's bright coat the bar  
To its renewal. Even border mountains now,  
That erst repelled the invader with a brow  
Of calm denial, have their granite scraped  
By skilful gardeners ; and the rough blocks shaped  
By storm and age cast a refreshing shade  
On prize pentstemons, there in lines arrayed  
By one who loves them ; while on plains below

Men buzz of pretty flowers that they grow, 90  
Or sterner are about the wide-spread field,  
Hedged and allayed with art and toil to yield  
Bread and the pleasant fruit that brings to men  
Health to be pleased and gender life again.  
It is a happy consequence of toil  
Upon the land that various shines the soil  
With varied life ; for did the labour cease,  
Monotony must lay a Roman peace  
On forest dim and dank, where scanty beasts, 100  
Infrequent flowers, shall meet the eye that feasts  
On many colours ; nor shall warblers trill  
The songs that ever earned the hush and thrill  
Of ecstasy : for they are mites that love  
A bounteous meal below, the sun above ;  
And regions where the land bears various fruit  
Enchanted are by the responsive flute  
Of the brown bird that tells to nights in spring  
The tale that poets never cease to sing,

In passages with such a pause between  
As gives clear thought of what the sweet parts mean. 110  
The Alps, that terrified the scourge of Rome,  
Use their rough sides for the edelweiss's home  
Whose woolly flowers, long kept, record the play  
Of city folk that find their holiday  
In travelling summarily to rose-flushed heights,  
Straining religiously to uncommon sights,  
Shuddering with easy awe at glaciers wide,  
Or prattling of the sunsets they have spied,  
Secure from dangers of the flood and fell  
Because some engineers have laboured well. 120  
A senate late sat in in a southern land  
To guard a scarlet orchid from the hand  
Of thievish dealers. And this land of ours  
Contains a spacious home for the earth's flowers  
That show to visitors from far and wide  
Themselves by art and patience beautified.  
There treasure, years and toil of man, combined

By the loving sureness of a nation's mind,  
Have made elastic lawns, refreshing glades,  
Sheltering recesses and protecting shades, 130  
Rills, quiet ponds and torrid glassy domes,  
Where tree and herb enjoy congenial homes  
Year after year ; where not in vain is sought  
The beauty of their loves unmarred by drought  
Or storm. You will forgive these stories slight  
Because they tell how pleasant is the sight  
Of happy plants to men in every clime,  
Of every colour and of every time,  
Where human lives please many human eyes  
And love of man brings love of all that dies. 140  
The very worms in their blind sweep contrive  
To keep the grass, torn up by force, alive ;  
Down through the kindly earth they drag the roots,  
Up towards the sun the withered stem re-shoots,  
And bears upon its summit grateful fruits.  
The tremor that the blushing maiden thrills,

When on her breast the youth lays daffodils  
Or lilies, is not for the love that lies  
Amid the radiance of the flowers' bright eyes :  
She cares not for the fires that shoot flames forth 150  
To the extremest disc-edge ; nor for the worth  
That lies in pistils' or in stamens' head,  
But loves alone the hangings of their bed,  
Most woman-like. Yet flowers have been the sign  
Through all the years that men and women pine  
Or joy for love of one another. Why ?  
Because their beauty is Love's drapery.  
The soldier shining in his scarlet might  
Who pleases maidens blushing in their white,  
The lilies luring on the strong-winged moth, 160  
The roses burning under damask cloth,  
The violets bent with weight of purple robes,  
The asters pushing forth their glistening globes,  
The sunflowers staring at their god above,  
Delight the world, for they are springs of love.

It is in Venus' month the world is young :  
Then Love awakes and sweetest notes are sung.  
Forth comes the sun, the plough, the horse, the hind,  
Each in his turn a gracious earth to find :  
The sower casts the seed with equal hands, 170  
Brown as the land ; the admiring farmer stands  
To see the work ; the odour of manure,  
Brought from where sea-birds bred for years secure,  
Fills nose and stomach, sweet as licorice,  
Till gentle showers dissolve and spread the mess  
For baby-wheat to suck : the lane below  
Nurses in shade the dying mass of snow  
Till lusty days pinch out its deadly white,  
And little children filled with new delight  
Run thither, free from mother's winter care, 180  
To bask in sunshine and to breathe the air.  
They pluck the primrose on the southern bank,  
Pale in its beauty as its gaze is frank,  
Patient withal of its lust's complex ways,

But growing weaker with the hotter days,  
Till, overcome by summer's heat and glare,  
Its flowers expire amid their increase fair ;  
And leaves droop rankly, flaccid, out of tune,  
In the great pomp and brilliancy of June,  
As old men mumbling bend to sunny floors 190  
When all the world is glad and out of doors.  
But these are going to adorn a home,  
Borne under children's laughter to their doorn  
Of spreading joy instead of myriad seed  
Produced, maybe, to die of very need ;  
For small fresh space there is to keep alive  
What joy kind eyes from teeming earth derive,  
Yet Love, aye mindful of the whole world's bliss,  
Brings forth excess of handsome flowers to kiss  
And toy amongst themselves whose weaker fruit, 200  
Falling on heedless crowds, dies ere the root  
Have sucked the joy of earth, and fades away  
Unconscious of the sun that shines away.

Through orchard trees the young procession goes  
Where Love enthroned on high cares not for foes,  
So watchful here is man the sentinel  
O'er the bright blossoms in their citadel  
Of rugged trees, save when the treacherous frost  
Attacks at night and stabs the gentle host—  
Frost, black or white, the blossoms' name for death 210  
That wars in vain, for Love still flourisheth,  
And laughs at death and mocks at future care,  
And lovely is the mirth of one so fair :  
It conquers prudence both in man and tree,  
And is the lover for eternity.  
So are the moments of the blissful Spring  
Filled with the motion of each beauteous thing  
That travels helplessly to new delights,  
Called Summer in their whole by happy wights  
Who still see herb and tree aflame with love, 220  
Day after day, around, below, above.  
'Tis now the flower that makes the lover's bed,



'Tis now the flower that circles maidenhead ;  
'Tis now the time that gardeners are glad  
At flower-guests, surging bright-eyed, so mad  
Are they with sheer desire. The tender rose  
Makes mankind drunken with its joys and woes  
In love, distilled to every passer-by  
Who learns just then how hard it is to die ;  
On brazen earth the pimpernel lies low 230  
And swears its passion with metallic glow ;  
Midsummer is when serried ranks of wheat  
Half hide from anxious men their gendering heat,  
And half reveal it in a dreamy haze  
That crowns the field of long, laborious days ;  
Red poppies flaunt their rank loves carelessly  
And die, like harlots, soon and suddenly ;  
Corn-cockle holds its simple stem erect  
With martial stiffness : bryony deflect  
Spreads its caresses o'er the thorn on high 240  
And wafts its kisses to its mate near by ;

While brambles, profuse of their pink and white,  
Promise the whole land's children sweet delight.  
Is Venus tired? The lazy autumn shows  
Her regnant still, but toying in repose ;  
Well-pleased, she sees what pleasure has bygone  
A present fruit, and languidly plays on.  
Around the house she's helped by man indeed  
Who adds in colour as he lessens seed :  
Bold zinnia, dahlia, and chrysanthemum 350  
Are brilliant ensigns of a cherished home,  
While purple daisy and anemone,  
Less cared for, blossom sad and modestly  
Before their death's dark days ; each hedge and wood  
Displays Love's colours in an apish mood  
Of memory, like vain eldfeigning youth  
With dull-eyed leer and courtesy uncouth ;  
But sober passion in the wild dies not  
Where ivy, easy in its long-lived lot,  
Tardily crowns itself with clustered flowers 260

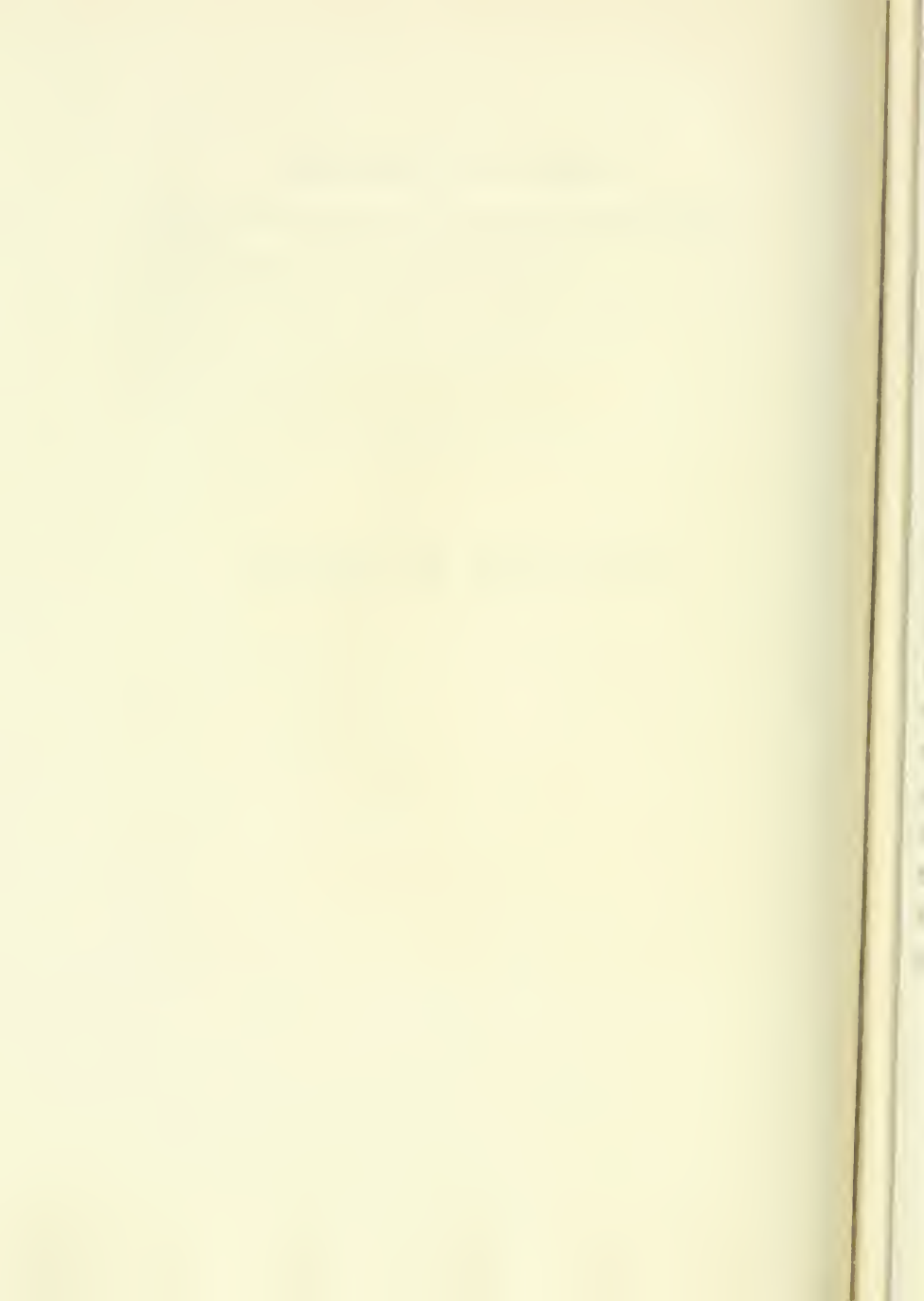
That now are nearly fruit, so scant the hours  
For pretty dalliyings. Then winter comes apace,  
When many an herb strains forward to the race  
Of next year's bliss : a single day of rain  
Deceives the daisies that begin again  
Their many-headed kissings. False the start ;  
And back they go to the post with yearning heart,  
Flouted by bitter cold. The chickweed low  
Is starred with blossoms white that gender slow,  
But fill the little birds with wholesome meat 270  
That keeps them warm till Spring's returning heat  
Brings luscious tables for a tuneful breast,  
And primroses to be by men re-blest.

Obvious and common are the things I write ;  
Obvious and common is the broad daylight ;  
On every side is spread the gentle green,  
And gold of wheat hath every mortal seen.  
These are the gifts a gracious Venus makes,  
And blest is he who thanks before he takes. 279

Then, Forman, raise your eyes and outstretched hands ;  
Thank her in star and sun and skiey lands  
That set the flower and fruit their ordered times  
And band the world with all-producing climes ;  
Thank her again who permeates the earth  
And makes it lovely to proclaim her worth.

*March, 1892.*

THE RITES OF VENUS.



## SECOND LETTER.

DEAR FORMAN, still forgive this jingling rhyme  
That now rings out for you a leisure time ;  
Nor should you ever these twin sounds despise  
As trivial art, like some that so advise,  
For rhymes please most, and what is pleasant must  
Be Life itself and raise man from the dust.  
What is this life of ours but bliss on bliss  
Whether the joy be meat, or drink, or kiss,  
Or the soft bed where weary limbs repose,  
Or the discomfiture of daily woes, 10  
That, small or great, are pains begetting death  
Unless we puff them off with strenuous breath,  
Or sons' achievements, or a daughter's grace,

Or quick reflections of a wifely face,  
Or loving memories of a parent's hearse,  
Or duty's round, or song, or pipe, or verse?  
May these rhymes please you : Truth, the other name  
Of Pleasure's self, shall keep their living fame,  
Truth that, like Pleasure, is the life of man,  
Who must see clear to live, and is the fan  
That sets the trust in human hearts aglow ;  
Nay ! is the air in which we live and do.  
But if plain words can lively things portray  
And move the reader, those that Truth display  
Atop of pleasant sounds must give delight  
More than all other things that meet the sight.  
Good rhymes for sermons true alone are fit,  
For Truth and Pleasure is one mark to hit ;  
'Twixt rhyme and reason is the bond confessed ;  
Call the bond Truth and in its pleasure rest.  
And when you come to faults in this my rhyme,  
Condemn its reason and no farther climb,

20

30



But think its writer, in your friendly way,  
With a desire to please has run astray.

Not long ago he called you to adore  
Her that unceasing strews upon earth's floor,  
Before all eyes, the riches of her grace  
In flower and fruit and grass's spreading lace.  
But she requires more than a sudden thought  
From those who are glad to serve her as they ought : 40  
Venus is Pleasure, Truth and Song combined ;  
No less than man's whole life is to her mind  
As a fit sacrifice before her shrine :  
Then let the offering be yours and mine  
Of life-long modesty, a smiling eye  
And kindly will for all humanity.

There was in ancient times a famous man  
Who all his peers in stately verse outran,  
And Venus was the goddess he adored,  
And she endowed him with the pregnant word ; 50  
Yet was his worship tainted with an ire

That jarred the sweeping utterance of his lyre :  
Contentious memory of the things he saw  
Begot impatience of his Lady's law ;  
While still he preached that nothing turns to naught  
Grave old Religion's nothingness he sought,  
And mad Lucretius smirched those deeds sincere  
That might have made his parable a sphere.  
—What is Religion but religious men ?  
And when were men without their churches ? When 60  
Did they forego their solemn march to fanes  
Built by themselves with loving care and pains ?  
Religion is men low before some shrine  
That sires and mates decree to be divine ;  
It is men interchanging kindly act  
In forms made sacred by the firm compact  
Of long experience. It is men prone  
Before a God that is their very own,  
A God that is their reverential part,  
A God whose substance is the human heart. 70

So did Lucretius scorn his myriad peers  
Who shaped his words, his thoughts, his hopes, his fears.  
'Tis true he thought in Iphianassa's case  
That men, religious, were unkind and base ;  
But these sinned long ago, beyond compare  
With those who breathed the civil Roman air,  
If sin they did, unknown to Homer's song,  
To add a tittle to the general wrong.  
But he, as well as we, faint credence pays  
To doubtful tales of ancient, doleful days :  
Why learned he not this crime as peers of ours  
Hear of a Jephthah's daughter in the hours  
That men devote to worship of the past,  
Snug in the fane where sleepy echoes last ?  
Where who asks this or that ? Yet each one pays  
A courtesy to tales of bygone days  
That saw his fathers, full of ill and good,  
Just like himself who yearns for loving brood.  
Nor did the poet's fellows shake for fear

80

Lest their own maids should cause an equal tear ; 90  
Nor did himself, devoted to the fair,  
Remember that the sacrificers were  
In quest of loveliest lady on the earth,  
And deemed all nothing to their Helen's worth :  
But he who made Religion far too tall  
Might well expect it at a word to fall,  
Whereas throughout the years, wights not above  
Six feet in height walked, died in children's love,  
And careful of the rites their fathers taught  
Passed on the same to the fresh lives they'd got. 100  
But some that think to teach our present day  
Use speech as foully when they strive to say  
That God is that of which folk have no sense,  
And is the title for man's ignorance.  
Foolish are these who struggle thus to show  
Religions are the varying forms of *No* ;  
Enticed by words, untrammeled by a fact

They brand as *No* long years of human act ;  
And those that find plain *No* sufficient creed  
Proclaim their *No* a very thing indeed. 110  
'Tis plain the gods that peoples must adore  
Are all compounded of their votaries' lore  
Of act and sight ; and men of kindred cares  
Find their lives mirrored in their common prayers.  
For 'twas the soldier safe from many wars  
Who lolled at ease and swore by lusty Mars ;  
It was the lady sighing with desire  
Who told to Venus all her hidden fire ;  
The lucky robber half his booty brought  
To Mercury as quick as thievish thought ; 120  
While those who found their world was made of books  
Chilled themselves stiff in cold Minerva's looks ;  
Till, tired of gods in ever-growing crowd,  
The world combined them and to one God bowed,  
Who spread, with Jews, splenetic o'er the lands

Where men groaned loud between contending bands,  
Or bought their lust and pillage off and, weak,  
Saw in a tortured God their sorrows speak.

But still the Unity that men allowed  
Showed various faces to a changeful crowd : 130

The subtle Grecian found it mixed of words  
That drave their utterer like lash-armed lords,  
And bowed himself, who had a double face,  
Before the mystery of 'Tri-Une grace ;

While Italy, the dame of act and awe,  
Enjoined obedience to the Church's law  
And ruled the West ; nor when her bond was burst  
By sturdy Northmen was the Godhead curst.

The sterner sort adored a direful face  
And told his battles for the Jewish race, 140

When milder men in the old temples found  
Him pleased with trodden ways and pleasant sound ;  
And now that men live gentle-voiced and tame

Child-like their God is glad to be the same.  
Let us then bow to Him that wide unfurled  
Displays our brothers' knowledge of the world,  
For Venus wills it so who brings us here,  
By way of father's love and hope and fear,  
To live our lives in easy-gliding lease  
And guide our children in the way of peace. 150  
What asks our Lady then? A little meed!  
For cheerful faces is her greatest need;  
Good manners, too, she begs of every wight,  
Nor smiles on fierce apologies of Right,  
For Right is where a gentle pleasure reigns  
And gentle deeds that lessen human pains;  
Nor does she ask of us a strenuous quest  
For atoms or for causes unconfessed,  
Since atoms, like the ever-living God,  
Vary as men, or vanish at a nod. 160

No need now, Forman, to uplift your eyes

To find our Venus in the starry skies ;  
With gracious mien she treads the pleasant ground,  
Arrayed in flesh, and utters human sound :  
Thank her with love for every man you meet,  
And she shall bless you from a mercy-seat.

*February, 1893.*



THE KINDNESS OF VENUS IN .  
THE LIFE AND DEATH  
OF MAN.



THIRD LETTER.

DEAR FORMAN, it is pleasant to forget  
Even sometimes a task of love. And yet  
I have no pleasure in the backwardness  
That makes the value of this letter less,  
For Death itself has driven my thought away  
From Lady Venus and her potent sway ;  
And she, displeased at my averted face,  
Withdraws in part perception of her grace.  
And how can I with easy quill indite,  
Conscious of having shunned a work so light 10  
As praise of her ? I did intend to pen  
Her power o'er lives so free as birds and men ;  
How the quick whitethroat through a summer's day

Wings to and fro in air a certain way  
To where a narrow, nettle-bounded pit  
Forbids his flight and scarce allows the flit  
Of eager, entering wings ; how he must rise  
And fall each even singing to the skies ;  
What clothes the chaffinch with a smart attire  
In Spring, and bids him swell the varied choir ; 20  
What makes him pert, and elevate his crest,  
Or bows him to the service of the nest ;  
What drives asunder the harmonious throng  
Of gentle linnets just as days grow long,  
And sets each lone against the sinking sun  
To triumph weakly for the day now done.

But Spring is past and birds are sad, and I  
Can only think how men must live and die  
And love ; and birds have little care for us  
Who crawl below them melancholious 30  
As, hot and swift, they cleave a purer air  
Till, drunk with light, they condescend to care.

But still with joy we watch our neighbours' pranks  
And kiss our wives and give the good God thanks.  
It isn't hard to smile on lass and lad  
When Love attacks them first and drives them mad  
For joy. The poorest traveller may see  
On stile or seat mutual felicity  
Where the warm stripling shudders with the bliss  
Of learning what is in a maiden's kiss  
Who thinks of naught, bathed in her novel joy,  
Bites with soft lips or plays at being coy,  
And fears no watcher if he only smile  
And strive to win their hearts with gentle wile.  
She shares with glistening eyes her lover's story  
Of tremors shy that ended in love's glory ;  
And such a tale is everyone's delight  
Since all have loved, remember, and have sight  
For this new picture of old joy and pain,  
That's painted lively in the quiet lane,  
For this result of seasons' changeful strife,

40

50

The first bright blossom of the Tree of Life.

Time is when mother's lap is all the world  
Till straight man stands with wistful arms unfurled  
To grasp the wonders of the land of shows,  
That proves to be a land of many woes ;  
Yet through grave hurts and cries and sore distress  
Does he not conquer it with eager stress ?

He joins himself with mates and seeks the streams,  
And fills the woods around with little screams

60

As mimic ships of his to unknown lands  
Glide in uncertain whirl, or when his hands  
Wrest from the hedge or bank some novel prize  
That brings rare sparkles to his mother's eyes ;  
He chases bright-eyed birds from song to song,  
And yet, a little child, he does no wrong ;  
They safely watch him play the hunter's part,  
And slyly they avoid his feeble dart :

Bold sports his father and his tutors teach  
Wherein he learns to use his strength 'gainst each

70

Playfellow with fair courtesy. To fight,  
To run, to leap, to swim, with measured might  
Are his ; and, master of his strength and ire,  
Modest he walks, the pearl of men's desire :  
Time brings him books wherein he sees past years  
Crowded with heroes ending sorrow's tears  
With temperance mild and resolution high,  
Closed in their mail by lady's stifled sigh ;  
He dreams by night of what brave men have done  
And plays their deeds beneath a mindful sun :  
And Time too leads him to his manhood's height  
When school-girls peep and fear the wondrous sight,  
Till courage comes and out they dart their share  
Of backward glances shot from faces fair,  
And saucy words and dainty tricks they learn  
From their own fear of inner needs that burn ;  
But well he knows these mates of childhood's days,  
And the familiar memory of their ways,  
Their fibs and cheatings over woodland fruit,

Blurs these fair flowers with an earthly root : 90  
He still laughs with them as a boy might do,  
While each frank laugh is tart to them as rue.  
Yet as he waxes, murmurs rise and fall  
How woman's beauty holds a man in thrall ;  
He deems it first vain noise and wonders why  
A thing beflounced should make a strong man cry :  
But bit by bit the tale falls in his ear  
Like the long winds that make the green wood sear,  
And then the stranger maiden brings the torch,  
Gently unknowing what power she has to scorch, 100  
And all the past of that well-nurtured youth  
Burns fiercely in the flame of love and truth  
And humble admiration, and his parts  
Dissolve into a future of twin hearts  
And fresh young lives that utter baby-cries  
Of tiny misery that ever dies  
In mother's carefulness and lullabies.  
Forth every morn he goes to strenuous deed,



And every night he comes to reap his meed  
Of tender looks from wife and rushing feet 110  
Of children emulous to seize the seat,  
The dancing, prancing saddle of his knee,  
And just a taste of clamorous liberty.  
Now every year he sees his children grow  
Towards his own dear youth that he loves so ;  
And as his forces wane, age's far sight  
Backward and forward brings a dim delight,  
The same that ushers in the nightly sleep  
When men forget to laugh, or work, or weep.  
This is man's life, his usual, common lot. 120

O happy man ! if only Death forgot  
To strike him tremulous time after time  
And rob him of the reason for a rhyme.  
It lays him prone upon the funeral mound,  
Listening and praying vainly for the sound  
Never to leave the quiet lips below  
That faintly smile up to his heavy woe,

'The seal of bygone love that still remains  
To weave sweet duty out of ancient pains.  
Yes! Forman, this cold Death that wounds so sore 130  
Is the sure sign that our affections' store  
Shall never wane. Sometimes your sudden thought  
That your own dearest shall one day be naught  
Must end in tender word and gentle glance,  
The very alphabet of Love's utterance;  
And you will yearn to keep the precious face,  
And hold it hidden in a warm embrace:  
Thus Death, the bitterest of Love's enemies,  
Does but make Love advance in loving guise.  
O Forman, Death is Love itself, I know, 140  
And Love to live must sometimes mask as woe,  
And hard it is for Love to suffer so.  
Yet from the Death-like Love we take this gain,  
To sorrow for and cure our neighbour's pain,  
To walk with kindly mien 'midst fellow-men  
And gratefully receive kind looks again.

And so from year to year we live and die  
Within the favour of great Venus' eye.  
And many gifts our Lady fashions meet,  
A lovely home ; a carpet for our feet, 150  
Bestrown with living ornaments that praise  
Their bounteous Maker in bright-coloured ways,  
Shining examples to us all to move  
With smiling face along the path of love ;  
A God that loves us since he proves to be  
Our own affections' epitome,  
Our father's image and our mates' desire,  
Our country's reverence that must never tire ;  
A loving woman glad to be our slave,  
Her beauteous form a warm and sheltering cave 160  
Wherein is nourished our undying part  
That issues forth to cheer our waning heart  
With the bright repetition of its youth  
Bound on the way of pleasure and of truth.  
What else then can I write but joyous words ?

And if I could I'd sing as do the birds ;  
But there's one season fit for jingling lays,  
And that is youth that leaps to easy praise ;  
And I, my friend, who hold a weary pen  
Now gladly hand it down to younger men.

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*November, 1893.*



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